

## The Batman

Welcome to Welcome to **Week 4 of Screens to Sacred** as we look at some moments in entertainment that can be good reflections and reminders for us to turn our gaze back to the Word of God.

As we have said each week this type of series gives us an opportunity to look for impressions of God or godly principles that we find in pop culture. Even though many of the creative entertainment works that we are going to be looking at are secular in nature and in some cases not even produced or written by people of faith, we can still find helpful spiritual principles and see glimpses of God throughout these creative works. And this should not surprise us. In fact, if anything it proves that man (no matter what his or her belief may be) has been created in the image of God and as image bearers we all reflect His glory whether through art, music, or movie entertainment. Another reason this is a profitable exercise for us is that it gives us a natural bridge by which we can have spiritual conversations and share the Gospel with other people even though they may not be believers or may not have ever read the Bible themselves. These popular movies and shows provide us a platform with which we can cultivate further conversations about God.

This week we are visiting the **2022** movie **“The Batman.”**

Batman is a classic character that’s been part of American pop culture for 80 years. One of the earliest comic book superheroes our country has had. For generations of storytelling Batman has been published across every possible medium. Radio, Theatrical Shorts, TV, Cartoons, Movies, Video Games, Board Games, Theme Parks, and so much more. The idea of the character has had many variations across the years but has stayed very grounded on a similar notion. A young boy who became an orphan because of the evil actions of another person, and that moment caused him to vow to fight against the evil that took his family. He dedicates all of his life and his future to that quest. We all have our orphan moments.

A wrong in our life that breaks our heart and brings us pain. That makes us feel slighted and motivates us to action. It usually doesn’t cause us to act out by putting on a rubber mask and some spandex for decades, but it does take our focus, our attention, and our life even in small portions.

Times we’ve been lied to. Times we’ve been betrayed. Times we’ve been robbed. Times we’ve been on the receiving end of unfaithfulness and heartbreaking wounds. These moments can consume us, and we can easily become engulfed in them.

Way back in the 1989 Batman movie, Michael Keaton became famous, and still is for his gruff delivery of **“I’m Batman.”** A criminal asked who he was, and he was obliged to answer in this way. In the 2022 film, Batman doesn’t refer to himself as Batman. When a criminal asks him the same set up question that was posed in 1989, he in turn replies **“I’m Vengeance.”** Even later when Penguin introduces him to Cat Woman he refers to him as **“Mr. Vengeance.”** and Cat Woman at one point tells him **“I thought you were Vengeance.”** Vengeance was his focus, his goal, because he thought that was what was needed and what was important.

It's natural for us to want vengeance. How many of you can think of someone right now that has wronged you? Someone you want to get back at. Someone you want to make pay, or something to happen to them to make them regret what they did to you. That's not only natural, but for a season of life, that was biblical instruction.

**Leviticus 24:17-22 (NIV)** <sup>17</sup>“Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death. <sup>18</sup>Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution—life for life. <sup>19</sup>Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: <sup>20</sup>fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. <sup>21</sup>Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death. <sup>22</sup>You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the LORD your God.”

The book of Leviticus was a book written primarily for the instruction of Levite priests with prescriptions for holiness and living. This was a time when Israel were nomads and had no solid place to call home, so the laws were a little more wild west and no nonsense when it came to things. This same thought is also echoed in **Deuteronomy 19** and in **Exodus 21**. Moses' people in that time needed this harsh boundary as a warning and as a reminder of the sacredness of human life and dignity. For us that often makes sense too. Pay people back for what they owe. That is dangerous living though and isn't healthy for building a lasting life. In the movie Batman spent 2 full years beating up every bad guy, and stopping every crime he could. He was full blown eye for an eye, but he was realizing it wasn't doing what he hoped for.

*“I wish I could say I'm making a difference, but I don't know. Murder, robberies, assault. Two years later, they're all up. And now this. The city's eating itself. Maybe it's beyond saving. But I have to try. Push myself.” - Batman*

Our vengeance rarely looks like Batman. We're hopefully not out there physically attacking people, but our vengeance can often be just as bitter. Our vengeance looks like someone stopped talking to you, so you stopped talking to them. Our vengeance looks like they embarrassed you, so you are going to embarrass them. Our vengeance looks like the pastor didn't say the right thing to me, so I'm gonna stop coming to church. Our vengeance looks like you made me feel unloved, so I'm gonna stop showing you love.

The reason we cannot be trusted with vengeance is because when we exact vengeance we usually do not measure it out justly. When all we do is seek to return action for action we can't expect things to actually get better. God is just we are not. The problem with our vengeance is that it usually moves into the realm of injustice or spite. We need to yield to God and His justice and our unwillingness to do so shows a lack of trust in God to do what's right on our behalf. Listen to God's instructions to us regarding vengeance.

**Proverbs 20:22 (NIV)** “Do not say, “I'll pay you back for this wrong!” Wait for the LORD, and he will avenge you.”

**1 Samuel 24:12 (NIV)** May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.”

Relying on vengeance and retaliation isn't going to make the world or our lives a better place. Listen to Batman's take on vengeance after pursuing it as his way of trying to make the wrongs he was encountering right.

*“I'm starting to see now. I have had an effect here... but not the one I intended. Vengeance won't change the past, mine or anyone else's.” - Batman*

That's not only Batman's take on things, but It's also Jesus' thoughts as well. Jesus knows what Moses once wrote, and then offers a different approach.

**Matthew 5:38-48 (NIV)** “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup> If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. <sup>43</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Luke ends the parallel passage in chapter 6 with this phrase

**Luke 6:35-36 (NIV)** <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Jesus stated that God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked, and that is the mercy we need to display. Paul shares with the Thessalonian church the same thing that Jesus shared years prior with the disciples.

**1 Thessalonians 5:15 (NIV)** Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

We have to move beyond showing others what they have done. We need to show them what they haven't seen. We need to move beyond trying to give them what we think they deserve and instead give them what they don't expect. **Hope. Mercy. Grace. Love.** Jesus laid out the golden rule quite clearly in **Luke 6**.

**Luke 6:31 (NIV)** “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Do to others as you would have them do to you, not as they have done to you. People need light, a vision of what’s possible, not just a reminder of their present darkness. This was the conclusion Batman came to.

*“I have to become more. People need hope. To know someone’s out there for them.”  
“The city’s angry, scared, like me. Our scars can destroy us. Even after the physical wounds have healed. But if we survive them, they can transform us. They can give us the power to endure... and the strength to fight.” - Batman*

We can’t keep doing a never-ending cycle of damage and expecting people to make it out in one piece. We actually have to start to do things that bring healing. Because we can’t expect anyone to heal if all we do is create more wounds. We have to break the cycle. Rather than seek vengeance we need to become examples of hope. **So how do we do that? What is the something MORE that we need to become in order to give hope to the hopeless and bring healing to the hurting?** Well, in **Romans 12** Paul gives us a very clear prescription for how to be examples of HOPE.

#### **Prescription #1 - Our love must be sincere**

**Romans 12:9-10 (NIV)** **9** Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

We cannot combat hopelessness and lead people beyond the cycle of brokenness if we have insincere love. Christians modeling “love” that looks nothing like Jesus is one of the main reasons people leave or avoid the church as a whole. We don’t have any business trying to lead or guide people we can’t love. Sincere love is not about me and does nothing to benefit me. It is freely given and it is only concerned with the other person’s wellbeing and what is good for them.

Vengeance says, me above you. Vengeance says you owe me. Modeling love and hope means we put others above ourselves. We seek to lift up, not retaliate. We come to the place where even the most undeserving feel like a priority. **Our love must be sincere!**

#### **Prescription #2 - Our zeal for God should never be lacking**

**Romans 12:11 (NIV)** **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

We maintain our ability to share the hope and love of Christ, by actually serving and spending time with Christ. We can’t model HOPE if we ourselves are not experiencing HOPE. We can’t model what we aren’t seeing ourselves and one of the main reasons people see a poor version of Jesus in us is because we haven’t spent enough time with Jesus to model Him accurately.

Right here in verse 12 we have three indicators of whether or not you are spending enough time with Jesus. How is your JOY? Is it zapped by feelings of hopelessness? How's your PATIENCE? Is it lacking in difficulties? How's your PRAYER? Has it been wavering? If anyone of these is out of whack we are not spending enough time with Jesus and our zeal will suffer!! Hard to have zeal for the Lord when you are not letting your soul marinate in His presence. We cannot muster this up on our own. It has to be Jesus working through us and in us! **Our love must be sincere! Our zeal for God should never be lacking**

### **Prescription #3 - Our generosity should be free flowing**

**Romans 12:13 (NIV)** Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Our experience in this world shows us that everyone is trying to get something from you. This is depleting, discouraging and breeds a feeling of hopelessness. As followers of Jesus we need to change that paradigm. Instead, we are going to give ourselves away. To those in need we are going to help them. To those who are lonely or have no place to go. We are going to be hospitable. I will give myself away so that you may have what you need.

**Romans 12:14-15 (NIV)** <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Be generous with your blessings, whether it is speaking life over someone who is cursing you, rejoicing with someone who is celebrating a victory, or whether it is being there with someone who has experienced loss and is in mourning. Be generous with your time, your words, and with your attitudes and actions! Give yourself away!! **Our love must be sincere! Our zeal for God should never be lacking! Our generosity should be free flowing**

### **Prescription #4 - Our peace should extend to all men**

**Romans 12:16-20 (NIV)** <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

We should strive to live at peace with all men regardless of stature or of their friendly status. The only thing that really hinders us from living at peace with others is PRIDE! It is pride that seeks vengeance when we are wronged. It is pride that causes us to look down our nose at someone based on their position or status. A key ingredient to peace and harmony is to put to death pride and to ultimately submit ourselves to God as instruments of peace in the world trusting Him to

right the wrongs that we cannot. If we have any enemy who for whatever reason is at odds with us our response should be such that it makes it hard for him or her to continue as our opposition because we are going to treat them as a friend.

So much of fighting against the cycle of eye for an eye, vengeance for vengeance, hurt for hurt simply comes down to us actually living like Jesus. Doing the things our Savior called us to do. That's how we transform our scars into healing and our hurts into hope.

Paul concludes this instruction with a single phrase that I believe changes the dynamic of how we fight.

**Romans 12:21 (NIV) <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

That last statement is the heart of everything. We can never overcome evil as long as we are fighting with it. We can't fight injustice with more injustice. If we truly want to be able to be the hope people need, then we have to start living as **models and examples of hope**. We have to bring good to where it's lacking. Hope to where it's scarce, and healing to those who do the most hurting.

In a semi recent comic book, **Batman #53** Bruce Wayne comes to realize that he had tried to make Batman into his god, and that he was wrong in this.

**Bruce: He's not God. He's not. He tries...he does...I know. And he fails, and he tries again. But he can't... He does not provide solace from pain. He cannot give you hope for the eternal. He cannot comfort you for the love you lost. God blesses your soul with grace. Batman punches people in the face.**

Batman realized that it was not his place to try and replace God, and it's a place we need to come to as well, because as long as we are trying to be responsible for the punishment of others, we are making ourselves into god, and that is a god we will be disappointed in, and will disappoint others as well. Will you let God be God? **(Pray)**

**Invitation:**

**How sincere is your love?**

**How is your zeal for God? How's your JOY? How's your patience? How's your prayer?**

**How is your generosity? Is it limited to only those who you think deserve it?**

**Are you at peace with all men? What's hindering that peace?**

**Who are the people that you need to free from your vengeance list? Will you trust God to bring justice for the injustice that has been done to you?**